

PAREN(T)HESIS – Comic Tradition



Our daughter and I enjoy a simple tradition: We read the comics from the Sunday *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* each week. We sit together on the couch and spend a few minutes with the four colorful pages. We subscribe to the print edition and pull it inside from the porch before breakfast. During the winter, it warms up to room temperature by the time we sit down with it and usually it gets us chuckling.

She is old enough to read the comics herself, but it's fun and cozy to sit together. On a busy day, we sometimes overlook our tradition and delay reading the comics until Monday night.

Between Friends is aimed at a midlife mindset and often makes me smile or laugh out loud.

She insists that I read the whole page, including *Garfield*, by Jim Davis, before enjoying my favorite. We keep a running joke that I try to skip ahead to my favorite comic, *Get Fuzzy*, by Darby Conley.

I read the whole section aloud, except the "riddles" submitted by children, which are part of *Doodles* by Foote & Sack. Last month these included the groaner, "What do skeletons say before a meal? Bone appetit!" This brand of humor makes me laugh, even writing about it hours later.

When we started this tradition, our daughter was reading but not proficiently. Sometimes I would question whether the content was appropriate for her age, such as when romantic topics flourish for Valentine's Day, but I have only rarely skipped a comic strip throughout the years. Now I view the more advanced topics as a good way to make sure we keep

talking about romantic relationships and puberty.

Politics sometimes show up in these comics and those usually don't interest her enough to warrant explanation. Occasionally a new vocabulary word arises or a cultural reference gives me a chance to explain a new topic.

My husband used to read to her as a bedtime routine, but after years of doing this, their habit has faded out.

I was surprised to learn that reading to children, even when they are very proficient readers, is still helpful. There's a difference between "listening level" and "reading level" and a child comprehends more advanced material when they are listening. Around eighth grade, the listening level and reading level match. Learning this made me want to resolve to read together more, or get serious about my idea to have a parent-child book club.

For now, we will stick to the comics and the tradition doesn't seem lost on our daughter. She has become one of her class newspaper's comic writers. (The joke was on us, her parents, because the first issue's jokes played on our quirks.)

The author is a freelance writer and mother of one. Reach her with comments or suggestions at jill@bayviewcompass.com.